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SPIDER-MAN

THE LOST HUNT

DeMATTEIS
MESSIAS
BRABO
MENON
PETER

MARVEL

SPIDER-MAN

THE LOST HUNT

PETER PARKER was bitten by a radioactive spider and gained the proportional speed, strength and agility of a **SPIDER**, adhesive fingertips and toes and the unique precognitive awareness of danger called **"SPIDER-SENSE"**! After the tragic death of his Uncle Ben, Peter understood that with great power there must also come great responsibility. He became the crimefighting super hero called **SPIDER-MAN**!

Years later, after an altercation with the villain the **JACKAL**, Peter was cloned. At this time, Peter, believing he was the clone, left New York City and the mantle of **SPIDER-MAN** to **BEN REILLY**. Peter and a pregnant Mary Jane Watson-Parker looked to begin a new life in Portland, Oregon. Now powerless, Peter Parker learns to live his life without...

SPIDER-MAN
THE LOST HUNT

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I KILLED SERGEI KRAVINOFF.

KRAAAK

A GOOD DEATH. A *NECESSARY* DEATH.

AND AFTER I BURIED HIS LIFELESS BODY IN THE GROUND...

HERE LIES

ER

I

H

T

F

KOOOM!

HERE LIES

...I BROUGHT HIM BACK.

SPIDER-MAN: THE LOST HUNT
CHAPTER ONE: HAUNTED

YOU'RE EXHAUSTED. I'M NOT SURPRISED.

DYING IS AN EXHAUSTING *BUSINESS.*

BUT THERE'LL BE TIME TO RECUPERATE LATER. FOR *NOW--*

--YOU AND I HAVE *WORK* TO DO.

YES, I KILLED SERGEI--BUT THAT WAS NEARLY A *CENTURY* AGO. WHY, THEN...

...DOES HIS GHOST HAUNT ME *STILL?*

PORTLAND, OREGON.
A Few Years Ago...

ABOUT TIME.

MARY JANE, I--

SNEAKING OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT LIKE A *TEENAGER?* DID YOU REALLY THINK I WOULDN'T *NOTICE?*

I...I WASN'T THINKING AT *ALL.* I JUST--

JUST *WHAT?*

TALK TO ME, *PETER.*

HARD TO EXPLAIN.

TRY.

SINCE THE...THE INCIDENT AT *GARID LABS* THAT TOOK AWAY MY *POWERS--*

--I'VE BEEN OFF-BALANCE. *DISORIENTED.* GUESS IT MAKES SENSE.

I MEAN, HOW DO I EVEN *BEGIN* TO MAKE A NORMAL LIFE FOR MYSELF--

--AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF BEING *SPIDER-MAN?*

AS MUCH AS I THOUGHT I'D MADE MY PEACE WITH IT...A PART OF ME IS STILL *HOLDING ON.*

I FIND MYSELF GAZING OUT THE WINDOW EVERY NIGHT... FIGHTING THE URGE TO *SWING* OVER THE CITY--

--BOUND ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS.

AND, TONIGHT, THE URGE...IT WAS OVERWHELMING. SO I *WENT.* AND MJ--

--IT ALMOST *KILLED* ME. IT ALMOST--

SUCH A SMALL THING.

THE GENTLEST MOVEMENT, THE TINIEST KICK, OF OUR UNBORN CHILD...

...AND I'M *OVERWHELMED*-- BY THE LOVE I FEEL FOR MY WIFE, *OUR BABY,* AND THE *HOPE* WE HOLD...

...FOR THE *NEW LIFE* WE'RE BUILDING HERE IN PORTLAND.

"THERE'S NO RESPONSIBILITY," I TELL HER, "*GREATER* THAN THIS. AND I PROMISE...I *SWEAR*--"

"--I'LL *NEVER* DO SOMETHING THIS STUPID AGAIN."

MARY JANE TAKES ME IN HER ARMS, COMFORTS ME AS ONLY SHE CAN...

...THEN DRIFTS OFF TO SLEEP.

BUT SLEEP *ELUDES ME.*

MY MIND KEEPS SPINNING BACK TO THE MOMENT WHEN I ALMOST PLUNGED OFF THAT ROOF. *WHEN I ALMOST DIED.* AND I SUDDENLY REALIZE--THAT TERRIFYING SENSATION...

...IS *NOTHING NEW.*

THIS IS WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING SINCE I WAS *15 YEARS OLD:* TAKING INSANE RISKS. DANCING WITH DEATH.

AND IT FEELS AS IF ALL THE FEAR, ALL THE *TRAUMA,* THAT I'VE HELD IN CHECK SINCE THE NIGHT I WENT AFTER THE BURGLAR WHO KILLED *UNCLE BEN...*

...HAS COME *ROARING OUT.*

I SEE THEM THERE IN THE DARKNESS: THE *COSTUMED LUNATICS--* SOME *SUPERHUMAN,* SOME MORE *ANIMAL* THAN MAN--ALL OF THEM UNITED IN ONE GOAL:

MY DESTRUCTION.

ANXIETY BURSTS, LIKE A RUPTURED ARTERY, IN MY CHEST; SPREADS, IN PARALYZING WAVES, ACROSS MY BODY. I TURN TO MARY JANE, ALMOST WAKE HER. BUT, NO--I CAN'T, I *WON'T,* BURDEN HER WITH THIS. BESIDES...

...I KNOW THIS WILL *PASS.* ALL THAT INSANITY ENDED...

...WHEN I STOPPED BEING *SPIDER-MAN.*

"PETER--"

--CAN YOU GET THE *DOOR* FOR ME?

MY HANDS ARE A LITTLE FULL HERE, AND I'VE GOTTA GET TO *SCHOOL* BEFORE--

*EARTH TO PETER...*EARTH TO PETER--

HE'S BEEN LIKE THIS FOR *DAYS* NOW...

--COME IN, PETER!

...LOST IN HIS OWN PRIVATE WORLD.

PETER!

AND NOTHING I SAY OR DO...

...CAN PRY HIM OUT OF IT.

--LEMME *GET* THAT.

HOW VERY *CONSIDERATE* OF YOU.

I'M *WORRIED*, PETER. EVER SINCE THE OTHER NIGHT, YOU--

IT'S NOT THAT. IT'S JUST...*WORK* STUFF. I--

KNOCK IT OFF, MJ. *SARCASM* ISN'T GOING TO HELP ANYTHING.

WELL, MAYBE A *LITTLE.*

HE'S A *TERRIBLE* LIAR. BUT I DON'T HAVE TIME TO PUSH RIGHT NOW.

SPEAKING OF WORK-- YOU'D BETTER GET DRESSED OR YOU'LL BE LATE.

WHAT...?

I...I'M SORRY! I DIDN'T *REALIZE!* HERE--

ARE YOU... *UPSET* ABOUT SOMETHING...?

LOVE YA, HANDSOME!

LOOK AT THAT STRAINED SMILE. HE'S TRYING *SO HARD* TO PRETEND HE'S FINE. WHY?

BECAUSE HE THINKS HE'S *PROTECTING* ME.

BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS, I *KNOW* MY HUSBAND...

...AND HE *ALWAYS* COMES AROUND, ALWAYS OPENS HIS *HEART*--IF I GIVE HIM ENOUGH SPACE.

BUT SOMETHING FEELS DIFFERENT THIS TIME. I'M *SCARED*...

...AND I CAN'T SAY WHY.

...PETERRRR...

MJ...?

I'M HERE, PETER.

ALWAYS HERE.

ALWAYS WAITING.

ALWAYS WATCHING.

EIGHT EYES IN THE DARKNESS.

AT YOUR BACK.

AND I'M HUNGRY, PETER.

SO VERY, VERY HUNGRY.

...PETERRRR...

THE ARROGANT VOICE. THE DARK PRESENCE. THE SICKENING SCENT. *GONE*...

...IF IT WAS EVER REALLY *HERE*--WHICH I *SERIOUSLY* DOUBT.

GUESS THE NIGHTMARES ARE SPILLING OVER INTO THE *DAYLIGHT* HOURS NOW.

ALL PART OF THIS--I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO CALL IT. THE SUPER HERO EQUIVALENT OF *PTSD...?*

OKAY, SO YOU LIVED YOUR LIFE ON THE EDGE ALL THOSE YEARS, ENDANGERING YOURSELF--AND, YES, EVERYONE YOU *LOVED.*

SO YOU PUSHED THE *FEAR* AND *ANXIETY* DOWN, LOCKED IT UP TIGHT, IN ORDER TO FUNCTION.

BUT THAT'S ALL *OVER* NOW.

YOU AND MARY JANE ARE MAKING A NEW BEGINNING IN A NEW CITY.

YOU QUIT YOUR JOB AT GARID, GOT A GREAT GIG AS A TEACHING ASSISTANT AT *PORTLAND PACIFIC.*

LIFE'S GOOD, PETER. NO--LIFE IS *GREAT.* AND THAT'S A RARE, PRECIOUS, GIFT. SO, FOR *GOD'S SAKE...*

...DON'T LET THE PAST *RUIN* IT.

How long have I been like this?

Lost in a timeless trance, my consciousness *expanded* by herbs and roots, powders and potions, that few would dare imbibe.

Reaching out *psychic fingers* and digging them deep--into Parker's *mind* and *heart.*

Parker? *No.* Peter Parker is just an *illusion,* woven around something older than time:

The Spider.

That left Sergei's son--my beloved student *Vladimir, the Grim Hunter*--broken and lifeless in a pool of blood.

A malignant entity that drove my dearest friend--*Sergei Kravinoff, Kraven the Hunter*--over a cliff-edge of madness and down into the eternal abyss.

These men were my family, my very *reason* for existence. And you took them from me, Spider. Left me adrift...

...with *grief and fury* as my only companions.

So I breathe you in, then breathe out *spite.* I breathe you in, then breathe out *rage.*

I breathe you in, then breathe out *loathing...*

...and an undying desire for *revenge.*

It's taken time for me to hunt you down, find you hidden away in this city, where you're pretending to live an all-too ordinary life.

But you can't hide from *Gregor* any longer, Spider.

I'm hunched, like a gargoyle, in the shadowed corners of your psyche, turning over rocks...

...and unleashing the *beasts* concealed beneath them.

Ah, but what I've done so far is just the *spark.*

Soon...

...you will be consumed in flames.

THIS JOB HAS BEEN A *GODSEND.*

I JUST TOOK IT SO I COULD BRING IN SOME EXTRA CASH. I MEAN, TEACHING *THEATER* TO *HIGH SCHOOL KIDS?* NOT EXACTLY THE RUSH I GOT FROM ACTING AND MODELING.

VALJEAN AND *JAVERT.*

BUT I LEARNED PRETTY QUICKLY...

...THAT THIS IS *SO MUCH BETTER.*

ONE'S THE HERO, AND ONE'S THE VILLAIN, RIGHT? OR *ARE* THEY?

AREN'T BOTH MEN DOING WHAT THEY BELIEVE IS *RIGHT?* AREN'T BOTH MEN STRIVING TO UPHOLD WHAT THEY SEE AS *MORAL AND JUST?*

PETER AND THE REST OF THE MASKS-AND-TIGHTS CROWD, THEY'RE ALL ABOUT THE *GRAND GESTURE.* DROPPING A HOUSE ON THE BAD GUY'S HEAD. STOPPING THE ALIEN INVASION.

BUT WORKING ON THIS PRODUCTION--SEEING HOW EAGER THESE KIDS ARE, HOW INSPIRED, HOW *HUNGRY,* TO LEARN AND GROW...

REMEMBER THAT ACTING IS ABOUT HAVING UNDERSTANDING... *COMPASSION*...FOR *EVERY CHARACTER* IN THE STORY--

--SO-CALLED HERO AND SO-CALLED VILLAIN *ALIKE.* AND THOSE ARE SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE YOU WELL--

--NOT JUST ON THE STAGE--BUT IN *EVERY ASPECT* OF YOUR LIVES.

NOW LET'S DO SOME *STRETCHES.*

...HAS SHOWN ME THAT YOU CAN ALSO CHANGE THE WORLD...

...ONE HEART AT A TIME.

AND CONSIDERING HOW *ALONE* I'M FEELING HERE IN PORTLAND, HOW CUT OFF FROM OUR OLD FRIENDS-- AND, LATELY, FROM PETER...

...I JUST MAY NEED THESE KIDS...

...MORE THAN *THEY* NEED *ME.*

MIND IF I *SIT...?*

WHAT? *OH. UH--*

--SURE.

YOU DON'T *SOUND* VERY SURE.

SORRY, I WAS JUST--

BROODING?

THAT *OBVIOUS,* HUH?

NO JUDGMENT. I CAN BE *QUITE* THE BROODER MYSELF.

AND JUST LIKE THAT...

...WE START TALKING, LIKE OLD AND DEAR FRIENDS.

HER NAME'S *TRACY MAKEBA,* A GUEST LECTURER AT PACIFIC. AN *INCREDIBLY* ACCOMPLISHED WOMAN:

A WORLD TRAVELER WHO'S WRITTEN AWARD-WINNING BOOKS ON EVERYTHING FROM SCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY...

...TO AFRICAN HISTORY AND GLOBAL RELIGIONS.

I SHOULD BE INTIMIDATED, BUT SHE PUTS ME RIGHT AT EASE. AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DAYS, I RELAX...

...AND ENJOY A FEW SIMPLE MOMENTS OF *HUMAN CONNECTION.*

AND I REALIZE HOW MUCH I'VE *MISSED* THAT.

THIS HAS BEEN NICE, PETER.

HOPE I GET TO MEET THAT AMAZING *WIFE* YOU KEEP TALKING ABOUT.

YEAH--

--I HOPE SO *TOO.*

AND IN THAT MOMENT, I *ALSO* REALIZE JUST HOW MUCH I'VE BEEN *PUSHING MJ AWAY...*

...AND I FEEL OVERWHELMED BY REGRET...

...AND SHAME.

REGRET?

SHAME?

THESE THINGS HAVE HAUNTED YOU ALL YOUR LIFE.

BECAUSE YOU HAVEN'T ALLOWED YOURSELF TO SURRENDER--

--TO ME.

THIS ISN'T REAL.

THIS *CAN'T* BE REAL.

LOOK AT YOU. JUST A BOY. WEAK. FRAIL.

AND YET I CHOSE YOU TO BE MY VESSEL.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT AN HONOR THAT IS? WHAT A BLESSING?

APPARENTLY NOT.

BECAUSE YOU'VE REJECTED ME, TIME AND AGAIN.

BUT I'LL HAVE YOU, PETER.

I'LL CONSUME YOUR INDIVIDUALITY. YOUR VERY SELF.

WITH THEIR HELP.

YOU SEE THEM AS YOUR ENEMIES-- BUT THEY'RE NOT. THEY'RE YOUR WHETSTONES.

SHARPENING YOU.

TEACHING YOU.

PREPARING YOU FOR UNION--

--WITH YOUR MASTER.

NO! GET AWAY FROM ME!

GET THE HELL--

--AWAY!

EXIT

AND I RUN.

CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT.

CAN BARELY BREATHE.

COLD PANIC FLOODS MY VEINS.

EVERY CELL IN MY BODY.

I RUN FOR BLOCKS.

FOR MILES.

AND WHEN I FINALLY STOP RUNNING, I *WANDER*...

...THROUGH A WORLD THAT SEEMS STRIPPED OF TIME AND PLACE. FEELING THE THING'S BREATH ON MY NECK. THOSE EIGHT EYES EVERYWHERE--*WATCHING* ME.

WHERE *WERE* YOU?

AND WHEN I FINALLY RETURN HOME...

...IT ALL GETS *WORSE.*

I...AH... I NEEDED SOME TIME TO *THINK,* SO--

SO YOU SKIPPED OUT ON WORK WITHOUT *TELLING* ANYONE?

WITHOUT TELLING *ME?*

LOOK, PETER--IF YOU CAN'T TALK TO ME--

--AND YOU *CLEARLY* CAN'T--

--THEN CALL *DR. KAFKA* IN NEW YORK. SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO--

I DON'T *NEED* A PSYCHIATRIST!

I'M NOT CRAZY! I'M--

I'M SO *SORRY,* MJ. I DIDN'T MEAN TO YELL. IT'S JUST--

WHAT? WHAT *IS* IT?

I *DON'T KNOW.*

;SIGH; WELL, WHEN YOU FIGURE IT OUT--

--YOU BE *SURE* TO *LET ME KNOW!*

SLAM

TUP

TUP

TUP TUP

MJ'S RIGHT.

WHHHHHHH

I *SHOULD* CALL DR. KAFKA.

IF ANYONE CAN SORT THIS OUT, IT'S *ASHLEY.* SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO HELP ME WHEN--

HELP...?

YOU'RE *BEYOND* HELP, PETER.

YOU'RE *LOST*-- AND YOU'LL NEVER FIND YOUR WAY HOME AGAIN--

--WITHOUT *ME.*

WHO *ARE* YOU? WHAT DO YOU *WANT* FROM ME?

STOP HIDING IN THE DAMN SHADOWS--

--AND *SHOW YOURSELF!*

IF YOU INSIST.

THIS THING. THIS...*SPIDER.* IT REACHES OUT: PUSHES, PROBES--BREAKING THE SKIN OF MY CONSCIOUSNESS.

CRAWLING THROUGH MY MIND!

RAAK!

GET THE *HELL* OUT OF MY HEAD!

OH, PETER-- I'M NOT SOMETHING... **OTHER** THAT CAN BE CAST OUT.

I'M **PART** OF YOU.

I'VE **BEEN** A PART OF YOU SINCE THAT FATEFUL DAY. THAT FATEFUL **BITE**--

CAN THAT BE ***TRUE?*** HAS THIS THING BEEN LIVING INSIDE ME ALL THESE YEARS? COURSING THROUGH MY BLOODSTREAM? POISONING MY LIFE?

"POISONING"? YOU IDIOT!

TOOM!

--THAT CHANGED YOUR MISERABLE LIFE **FOREVER.**

I SAVED YOU! TOOK A **HELPLESS** CHILD--

--AND MADE HIM A GOD!

RELEASE YOUR ATTACHMENTS TO THE PERSON YOU THINK YOU ARE.

TO THE FLESHLINGS YOU SO DESPERATELY CLING TO.

THEY'RE NOTHING BUT OBSTACLES ON YOUR PATH TO GREATNESS. OUR PATH.

NOW GIVE YOURSELF TO ME, PETER--

--MIND AND BODY, HEART AND SOUL.

AND ONCE I'VE DEVOURED YOU, DIGESTED YOU, WE'LL--

--WE'LL--

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

WHAT

ARE

YOU

RRRKLLLUPPPBOOOOOM!

NO!

I HAVE A *WIFE!* A *CHILD* ON THE WAY! A *LIFE!*

MY LIFE!

AND I WON'T LET YOU *TAKE* IT FROM ME!

DONUT

DO YOU HEAR ME, SPIDER?

KRAK

I WON'T LET YOU!

...I...

STUPID MOVE, MJ...

...STORMING OUT LIKE THAT.

THAT'S THE KIND OF THING YOUR MOTHER USED TO DO. BUT MELODRAMA NEVER SOLVED A PROBLEM OR SAVED A MARRIAGE.

PETER'S HURTING-- IN A WAY I'VE RARELY SEEN...

...AND I CAN'T LET MY OWN ISSUES GET--

WHAT--

WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

THERE...THERE WAS A THING. A... A SPIDER.

AND IT TRIED TO KILL ME...JUST LIKE... JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHERS TRIED... FOR ALL THOSE YEARS.

BUT I STOPPED IT, MARY JANE! I--

DEAR GOD.

WHAT HAVE I DONE?

WE'LL GET THROUGH THIS, MY LOVE. DON'T YOU WORRY.

WE'LL FIGURE THIS OUT AND GET *THROUGH* IT--

--*TOGETHER.*

WE'VE BROKEN HIS MIND, *MISHKIN*--

--AND SOON WE WILL BREAK HIS *BODY. FINISH* WHAT SERGEI BEGAN--THAT NIGHT HE LAID PETER PARKER IN HIS *GRAVE.*

ROWWWRR

THE HUNTER MADE ONE FATAL ERROR THEN: HE *RESURRECTED* PARKER. BUT *THIS* TIME, MY FRIEND--

--SPIDER-MAN DIES FOR *GOOD.*

SPIDER-MAN
RYAN BROWN
—22—

SPIDER-MAN: THE LOST HUNT
CHAPTER TWO: BROKEN

KILL ME, MISHKIN.

OR TRY TO.

The cat's muscles tear beneath my fingers. His bones tremble, on the verge of splintering...

...and a part of me wants to choke the life out of him. Hear him yowl in pain.

Watch his blood rush, like an overflowing river, across the floor.

But Mishkin is my companion. My familiar. If I slay *him*...

...I slay *myself*. I--

A *REMINDER* PERHAPS--THAT WE MUST PUT ASIDE OUR *GAMES*...

WAIT.

DO YOU *FEEL* THAT? A *PRESENCE*-- SO ALIEN, YET SO INTIMATE--

--*HOVERING* ABOUT US.

...and *resume the hunt.*

WHAT *HAPPENED* HERE TONIGHT?

I WAS ONLY GONE FOR HALF AN HOUR, BUT WHEN I CAME BACK, I FOUND... ALL OF *THIS.*

OUR LIVING ROOM TURNED UPSIDE DOWN. FURNITURE SMASHED. MIRRORS SHATTERED. AND PETER--

PETER'S BEEN *BABBLING* ABOUT CREATURES CRAWLING FROM THE SHADOWS. A *GIANT SPIDER* TRYING TO DESTROY HIM. DESTROY *US.*

DEAR GOD, HAVE I LOST MY *HUSBAND?*

HAS HE LOST *HIMSELF?*

I THINK... I THINK I CAN GET *UP* NOW.

YOU *SURE?*

YEAH. YEAH. WE'VE GOTTA CLEAN UP THIS MESS AND--

WE'LL DO IT IN THE MORNING.

BUT--

I SAID *IN THE MORNING.* RIGHT NOW--

"--WE COULD *BOTH* USE SOME SLEEP."

NO.

YOU'RE NOT *SPIDER-MAN* ANYMORE. RUNNING AROUND THE ROOFTOPS ALMOST GOT YOU *KILLED* LAST TIME--

--AND I'LL BE *DAMNED* IF I LET YOU SNEAK OFF AND DO IT AGAIN.

YOU CAN'T RUN FROM THIS. AND YOU CAN'T RUN FROM *ME.* *WHATEVER'S* GOING ON--

--WE'LL DEAL WITH IT *TOGETHER.*

PETER SMILES LIKE A BEWILDERED LITTLE BOY AND I LEAD HIM BACK TO BED. HE SLEEPS.

I DON'T.

...I'M SO SORRY, MARY JANE.

TEN APOLOGIES ARE *MORE* THAN ENOUGH. WHAT I WANT--

--IS TO *UNDERSTAND.*

IT'S LIKE...LIKE I'M GOING THROUGH *WITHDRAWAL* FROM ALL THOSE YEARS AS SPIDER-MAN.

NOW THAT MY *POWERS ARE GONE*-- MY MIND IS LETTING IT ALL IN.

LETTING *WHAT* IN?

THE RISKS... THE DANGERS... THE *TERROR* OF WHAT I DID--

--*DAY* AFTER DAY, YEAR AFTER *YEAR.* I HAD TO PUSH IT DOWN, PUSH IT *AWAY* FOR SO LONG--

--AND IT FINALLY CAME *ROARING* OUT.

AND YOU THINK THAT'S WHAT SET YOU OFF LAST NIGHT? CAUSED THE *PANIC?* THE *HALLUCINATIONS?*

YEAH.

THEN YOU'VE GOT TO CALL *DOCTOR KAFKA* IN NEW YORK.

YOU'RE RIGHT. IF *ANYONE* CAN HELP ME, IT'S--

FEAR.

NO!

I DON'T WANT A *THERAPIST* ROOTING AROUND IN MY HEAD! TELLING ME I'M *CRAZY!*

BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT SHE--

RAGE.

DIDN'T YOU *HEAR* ME? *I'M NOT CALLING HER!*

It's taken years of preparation.

Ingesting herbs and potions that would have *destroyed* a lesser man.

Widening my consciousness. Strengthening my body. Mastering the skills...

...that have allowed me to dig into Parker's mind, overturn rocks...

...and let the *psychic insects* crawl up and out of the dark, moist earth of his unconscio--

Again, the presence.

So clear in my mind, I could almost *see* it.

Someone is trying to overturn rocks in *my* psyche.

Let them believe I'm not *aware* of them. All the better...

...to spring the trap *later.*

JUST A FEW MORE TWISTS OF THE KNIFE, MISHKIN. *SOON--*

"--THE SPIDER *FALLS.*"

PETER! I'M SO GLAD YOU ACCEPTED MY INVITATION!

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

SEEKING SOME SEMBLANCE OF *NORMALCY,* I GUESS.

AND THIS MUST BE *MARY JANE.*

YOU'RE A LUCKY WOMAN.

YOUR HUSBAND CAN'T STOP SINGING YOUR *PRAISES.*

TRACY MAKEBA IS A VISITING PROFESSOR AT *PORTLAND PACIFIC,* WHERE PETER WORKS.

THE TWO OF THEM SEEM TO HAVE MADE SOME KIND OF EMOTIONAL CONNECTION.

AND MAYBE THAT'S WHAT HE...WHAT WE *BOTH*...NEED RIGHT NOW. SIMPLE HUMAN CONTACT. CONVERSATION. A *REAL LIFE.*

I'VE FELT SO *ISOLATED* SINCE WE'VE MOVED TO PORTLAND. OH, I LOVE MY JOB, TEACHING THEATER AT THE HIGH SCHOOL. BUT FRIENDS? I HAVE NONE.

AND, AS THE NIGHT UNFOLDS...

DEMONS.

...I FIND I *LIKE* THIS WOMAN.

TRACY'S WARM, WELCOMING. FUNNY AND WISE.

I KNOW WE WEREN'T *INVITED,* PETER-- BUT WE *HAD* TO COME.

AND SHE'S *LIVED.* TRAVELED THE WORLD. LECTURED AT UNIVERSITIES IN A DOZEN COUNTRIES. WHAT AN AMAZING--

HAD TO SEE YOU... AS YOU *TRULY* ARE.

SOMETHING'S *WRONG.*

STRIPPED OF THE SPIDER'S SKIN. STRIPPED OF YOUR DIGNITY.

A WEAK, INEFFECTUAL... *NOTHING.*

I CAN SEE IT IN HIS FACE.

A SSSPINELESS, NEUROTIC *COWARD.*

AND *THESE* TWO!

WHAT *DELICIOUSSSS MEALS* THEY'D MAKE!

WHAT A PLEASURE TO SSSUCK THE *TASTY FLESH* FROM THEIR BONESSS!

THE *PANIC* IN HIS EYES.

STOP IT.

SWEETIE--

--YOU *OKAY...?*

HIS HANDS ARE *TREMBLING.*

MAKEBA NOTICES TOO...

GO *AHEAD,* VERMIN! *INDULGE* YOURSELF!

YUMMMM.

...BUT SHE JUST WATCHES HIM WITH A STILLNESS, A *CALM,* THAT--

STOP!

DAMN. IT'S HAPPENING *AGAIN!* HE'S *LOSING* IT, AND THERE'S NOTHING I CAN--

STOP *WHAT,* PETER?

ONE TOUCH...

...I THINK...

I THINK I MUST'VE...I DUNNO...*DOZED OFF* FOR A MINUTE AND--

...AND HE'S *HIMSELF* AGAIN.

DOESN'T MATTER.

EVERYTHING'S *FINE* NOW.

HOW IS IT *SHE* CAN DO WHAT I *CAN'T?* WHY DOES PETER RESPOND TO *HER...*

...AND NOT ME?

...I'M SORRY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE. PETER'S BEEN UNDER A LOT OF *STRESS* SINCE WE MOVED HERE AND--

THERE'S *NOTHING* TO APOLOGIZE FOR.

WE ALL HAVE OUR STRUGGLES. WE ALL WRESTLE WITH DEMONS.

BUT HE'S GOING TO BE *FINE.* YOU *BOTH* ARE.

YOU KNOW SOMETHING I *DON'T?*

CALL IT A FEELING. *INTUITION.*

I'D REALLY LIKE TO *BELIEVE* THAT. BUT RIGHT NOW, I'M JUST *SCARED.*

TRUST ME, MARY JANE. IT ISN'T OFTEN--

"--THAT MY INTUITION IS *WRONG.*"

THE WAY SHE TALKS. AS IF SHE'S PRIVY TO SOME KNOWLEDGE... SOME *COSMIC SECRET...*

...THAT THE *REST* OF US DON'T KNOW.

SO WE GO HOME, PETER WITHDRAWING DEEPER INTO HIMSELF.

I DREAMED A DREAM OF DAYS GONE BY...

SO THE NEXT DAY COMES--AND I *LOSE* MYSELF IN WORK. AT LEAST...

...I *TRY* TO.

BUT THE FEAR, THE WORRY, JUST BUILDS. IT'S LIKE A PIPE BURSTING.

MRS. PARKER?

MRS. PARKER--YOU *OKAY?*

I CAN'T HOLD IT BACK.

I'M...I'M FINE, *KATIE.* YOUR SONG...IT WAS *SO BEAUTIFUL--*

--IT BROUGHT ME TO *TEARS.*

WHAT KIND OF *LIFE* IS THIS?

MARY JANE AND I HARDLY SAID A WORD TO EACH OTHER LAST NIGHT. I SKIPPED OUT ON MY AFTERNOON CLASSES.

(STRIPPED OF THE SPIDER'S SKIN. STRIPPED OF YOUR DIGNITY.)

BEEN WANDERING AIMLESSLY FOR HOURS, TRYING TO FIGURE THIS ALL OUT. SORT THROUGH THE ANXIETY. THE PARANOIA.

(A WEAK, INEFFECTUAL... *NOTHING.*)

BUT MY THOUGHTS ARE LIKE A SWARM OF LOCUSTS. I CAN'T GATHER THEM. CAN'T *FOCUS.*

(A SPINELESS, NEUROTIC *COWARD.*)

ADMIT IT: MJ'S RIGHT. SHE'S *ALWAYS* RIGHT.

PETER--

--WHERE THE HELL *ARE* YOU?

I *HAVE* TO CALL DOCTOR KAFKA AND GET SOME--

ROWWWRRR

PETER...?

COME, SPIDER. THERE IS MUCH WE MUST DISCUSS--

FOR A MOMENT-- IT WAS AS IF I COULD *FEEL* HIM. HIS CONFUSION. HIS *FEAR.*

BUT NOW...

--BEFORE YOU DIE.

...HE'S GONE.

...DO YOU *REMEMBER* ME, PARKER?

...G-GREGOR...?

YES. I HAVE BEEN THE *COLD SHADOW* AT YOUR BACK FOR ALL THESE WEEKS.

YOU? YOU'RE THE REASON I'VE BEEN--?

THE TRAUMA IS YOUR *OWN.* I SIMPLY GAVE IT...A LITTLE *PUSH.*

BUT-- *WHY?*

WHY?

HA-HA-HA-HA!

SERGEI AND VLADIMIR KRAVINOFF ARE *MOLDERING* IN THEIR GRAVES... THE VERY FABRIC OF MY LIFE WAS TORN FROM MY HANDS--

--AND YOU HAVE THE *AUDACITY* TO ASK *WHY?*

THE PAST--AGAIN. BUT NOT GHOSTS THIS TIME.

NOT HALLUCINATIONS.

THIS IS *REAL.*

AND I CAN'T LET IT *GO ON.*

I WON'T LET IT GO ON!

KRAAAK!

I MAY NOT HAVE MY *POWERS* ANYMORE, BUT I'VE TAKEN ON *DOZENS* OF LUNATICS LIKE GREGOR...

...AND I HAVE SKILLS... REFLEXES...

BOOM!

...HONED BY *YEARS* OF BATTLE.

YOU TRIED TO *SHATTER* MY MIND...*DESTROY* MY LIFE--

--BECAUSE YOU WERE SEEKING *REVENGE*? REVENGE FOR *WHAT*?

RRRRRRRRR

BUT JUST BECAUSE I *CAN* FIGHT...

I DIDN'T KILL KRAVEN-- HE TOOK HIS *OWN* LIFE! AND WHAT HAPPENED TO VLADIMIR HAD *NOTHING* TO DO WITH ME!

...DOESN'T MEAN I *SHOULD*.

THERE'S *NO REASON* FOR US TO DO THIS! *BURY* THE PAST, GREGOR! LET THE DEAD *STAY* DEAD AND--

LET THE DEAD *STAY* DEAD?

TELL ME--

--HAVE YOU LET YOUR *UNCLE* REST? YOUR *AUNT*? YOUR BELOVED *GWEN*? HAVE YOU *FORGOTTEN* THEM AND MOVED ON?

I DON'T THINK SO!

THE PAST IS *ALWAYS* WITH US--

THWAKK!

KRAAK!

--AND THOSE WE HAVE LOVED AND LOST WILL *HAUNT* US... *TORMENT* US--

SHRAK!

--FOREVER!

BUT YOU KNOW THAT...*SPIDER*-- BETTER THAN I!

TUFFT!

YOU'RE A *DEVIL!* A *TRICKSTER!* YOU SKULK WITHIN THE SOFT FLESH OF PETER PARKER--

SKQQM!

--AND WAIT TO *CRAWL* OUT... *CONSUME* ME--

--AS YOU DID *SERGEI!*

YOU'RE--

YOU'RE AS INSANE AS *HE* WAS!

IF I *AM* MAD-- IT'S BECAUSE *YOU* HAVE DRIVEN ME TO IT!

SO *COME FORTH,* SPIDER!

SHOW YOURSELF!

REVEAL THE FULLNESS OF YOUR *DARK MALIGNANCE*-- AND *PERHAPS* I'LL LET YOU DIE--

BRAMM!

BRAMM!

BRAMM!

BRAMM!

--WITH AN IOTA OF DIGNITY.

BUT THEN *AGAIN*--

--PERHAPS NOT.

KRAAK

KRAVEN HUNTED YOU. KRAVEN KILLED YOU. BURIED YOU SIX FEET IN THE GROUND. BUT THEN HE MADE A *FATAL ERROR*--

HE BROUGHT YOU BACK.

AH... BUT WHEN *I* KILL YOU, SPIDER--

--YOU'RE GOING TO *STAY* DEAD.

AND THEN I'LL TURN MY ATTENTION TO YOUR *WIFE* AND *UNBORN* CHILD. THEN I'LL DECIMATE *YOUR* FAMILY--

--AS *YOU* HAVE DECIMATED *MINE.*

NO, GREGOR--

--PLEASE...!

DO YOU *KNOW* THIS WEAPON, SPIDER?

YOU *SHOULD.*

THIS IS THE *SAME RIFLE* SERGEI PLACED IN HIS TREMBLING HANDS--

--AND THRUST IN HIS *MOUTH.*

I WAS THE ONE WHO HEARD THE *THUNDEROUS BLAST.*

WHO *FOUND* HIM THERE, BLOODY AND LIFELESS. WHO WEPT OVER *HIS* CORPSE...

...JUST AS I WEPT OVER HIS *SON'S.*

I...I WON'T LET YOU *HURT* HER.

HURT *THEM...!*

Look at him: utterly broken. He knows there's no hope...

...yet something inside him fights against the pain and hopelessness...

...and *struggles on.*

Is it the Spider, thrashing angrily, defiantly, in his soul? Or is it simply the last act...

...of an all-too-human, all-too-desperate, man?

NO! This ***isn't*** a man! This is a ***thing!***

The thing that drove Sergei to ***suicide!*** That urged Parker's mirror-self--that bastard ***Kaine***--to ***slaughter*** poor Vladimir!

And mine is the hand...

MARY JANE, I LOVE YOU.

...that now avenges them both.

I LOVE Y--

BLAM

NO!

THIS MAN WILL NOT DIE TONIGHT!

MOTHER...?!

THERE IS A VIOLENT STORM IN EVERY PERSON'S HEART.

KRA-KOOOM!

LIGHTNING. THUNDER.

NATURE'S UNBRIDLED RAGE.

ROWWRR

A PLACE--IN THE SACRED CORE OF OUR BEING--WHERE VIRTUE AND COMPASSION DWELL.

AND THERE IS A CALM AS WELL.

I LOOK AT ONE MAN, CONSUMED WITH VENGEANCE.

I LOOK AT ANOTHER, ALIGHT WITH LOVE FOR THE WIFE HE FEARS HE'LL NEVER SEE AGAIN.

AND I BEHOLD THE GHOST WHO HAUNTS THEM *BOTH*:

THE TEMPEST OF HIS MADNESS...

BLAM

...TEARING THROUGH *BOTH* THEIR LIVES.

NO!

THIS MAN *WILL NOT DIE* TONIGHT!

MOTHER...?!

SPIDER-MAN: THE LOST HUNT
CHAPTER THREE: FRENZY

PUT YOUR TOYS AWAY, CHILD!

SWAK

IT'S TIME, AT LAST, TO BE THE MAN--

--I ALWAYS DREAMED YOU'D BE.

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, YOU DARE TO COME HERE?

YOU DARE TO LECTURE ME?!

YES. AND IT'S A LECTURE I SHOULD HAVE DELIVERED LONG AGO.

KRAAAAK

YOU HAVE DENIED YOUR PAST...YOUR HERITAGE!

CLAIMED KRAVINOFF'S HISTORY AS YOUR OWN!

BUT NO MATTER HOW LONG A PERSON LIVES A LIE, MY SON, IT STILL REMAINS A--

BUT A FEW WORDS, INCANTED IN AN ANCIENT TONGUE...

BEHIND ME: THE CAT LEAPS.

...CONFUSE THE BEAST.

STILLING THE FURY IN ITS BREAST.

FOR NOW, AT LEAST.

BUT *HIS* FURY WILL NOT BE SO EASILY STILLED.

HE ROARS--MORE OF AN ANIMAL THAN HIS FELINE COMPANION.

IS THIS TRULY THE SON I RAISED TO LOOK UPON ALL LIVING THINGS WITH *REVERENCE?* WITH *AWE?*

AND IS HIS TRANSFORMATION *MY* FAILURE...

...OR *SERGEI'S?*

A QUESTION I'VE PONDERED FOR YEARS. AND THE ANSWER REMAINS... *COMPLICATED.*

BUT WHAT'S *NOT* COMPLICATED IS THIS:

PETER PARKER MUST SURVIVE. AND I WILL PROTECT HIM...

...AT ALL COSTS.

GO AHEAD, *TAKHAR.*

SLIT MY *THROAT.*

AH...BUT YOUR HAND *TREMBLES.*

IS THAT *FEAR--*

TOK

--OR *LOVE?*

PAIN'S UNBEARABLE. CAN HARDLY STAND. HARDLY *THINK.* BUT...

...THAT WOMAN. AM I *CRAZY*...

MY NAME IS *NOT* TAKHAR--

--IT'S *GREGOR!*

YOU CALL *ME* A LIAR? BUT IT'S MY LIFE *BEFORE* THAT WAS THE LIE!

SERGEI SHOWED ME THE *TRUTH!* HE SHOWED ME--

FOOL!

WHY DO YOU STILL CLING TO THE *DELUSION* THAT KRAVINOFF WAS A GREAT MAN?

...OR IS THAT *PROFESSOR MAKEBA* FROM THE UNIVERSITY?

THAT HE *CARED* FOR YOU... CARED FOR *ANYTHING*--

--BEYOND HIS OWN IMMENSE AND FRAGILE *EGO?*

IT *CAN'T BE.* BUT IF IT IS... THEN SHE'S BEEN *LYING* TO ME. *STALKING* ME.

SERGEI WAS THE GREATEST MAN I'VE EVER *KNOWN*--AND I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU--

GREGOR SAID HE DOESN'T JUST WANT *MY* BLOOD, HE WANTS *MARY JANE'S* TOO.

AND THE BLOOD OF OUR *UNBORN CHILD.*

--TO *BLACKEN HIS NAME!*

AND MAKEBA... OR *WHOEVER* SHE IS...COULD BE JUST AS MUCH OF A THREAT.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT OLD HATREDS DRIVE THOSE TWO--BUT LET THEM FIGHT IT OUT. LET THEM *KILL* EACH OTHER...

YOU *SHAME* ME, TAKHAR!

SWAAK!

YOU *DISGRACE* OUR PEOPLE!

TAK!

FRA

...FOR ALL I CARE.

YOU'RE EVERYTHING *HE* WAS!

TU

...GAHH...

S-STOP...

STOP!

EVERYTHING I *DESPISE!*

YOU'RE KILLING HIM!

I CALLED *TAKHAR* A FOOL--

--BUT *I* AM THE FOOL HERE.

THE SCENT OF ***BURNING HERBS***-- WAFTING THROUGH THE AIR. THE ***ANCIENT OILS***-- KNEADED INTO MY CHILD'S SKIN.

ALL MEANT TO BRING OUT THE DARKEST...MOST ***VIOLENT*** AND ***PRIMITIVE***... IMPULSES IN HIS WARRIOR SOUL.

AND MY ***PSYCHIC CONNECTION*** TO HIM IS SO OLD, SO PROFOUND--

--THAT THEY CORRUPTED ***MY*** MIND AND HEART. WITHOUT ***YOU***, PETER--

--I MIGHT HAVE ***MURDERED*** MY OWN SON. I--

...HUHHH...

PETER...?

ALIVE.

BUT NOT FOR *LONG.*

PROFESSOR MAKEBA... *TRACY--*

HOW...?

KAFF KAFF

TRACY MAKEBA IS A FICTION. A CONVENIENT MASK. MY NAME IS *AJA ORISHA*...KNOWN TO SOME AS--

--THE *HUNTER.*

H-HUNTER...? LIKE...LIKE *KRAVEN...?*

NO. *SERGEI* WAS A *KILLER.* I--

--AM A *HEALER.*

KAFF WHAT...WHAT *IS* THAT?

A WAY TO WIDEN YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS.

YOUR INJURIES RUN *DEEP,* PETER--AND THEY ARE NOT CONFINED TO THE BODY.

NO. THE KEY TO YOUR RECOVERY--

WH-WHAT...?

--LIES ELSEWHERE.

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

HOW DID I GET HERE?

THIS COCOON... THIS WEB...IT'S CRUSHING ME.

SUFFOCATING ME.

LET ME OUT... PLEASE.

LET ME OUT!

THE MORE YOU FIGHT AGAINST IT--

--THE *TIGHTER* THE WEB WILL HOLD YOU.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? WHERE HAVE YOU *TAKEN* ME?

I'VE TAKEN YOU NOWHERE, PETER. THIS IS *YOUR* WORLD. THIS--

--IS THE *LANDSCAPE OF YOUR MIND.*

YOU'VE BEEN SUFFOCATING IN THERE SINCE YOU WERE A *TEENAGER.*

SHIK K

FROM THE MOMENT THE SPIDER'S VENOM ENTERED YOUR BLOODSTREAM AND TRANSFORMED YOU--

--A PART OF YOU HAS REMAINED *ENTRAPPED* HERE: TERRIFIED. TRAUMATIZED.

BUT WE ALL CONTAIN CONTRADICTIONS, PETER. WE ALL WEAR MANY FACES.

THE BOY CAUGHT IN THE SPIDER'S WEB IS *ONE* OF THEM. AND *HE*--

--IS *ANOTHER.*

DONE WITH ALL THE *PSYCHOBABBLE,* LADY?

"OH, IT'S SUCH A TERRIBLE BURDEN BEING *SPIDER-MAN!"*

"OH, IT'S *SO* SCARY!"

REALLY, PARKER--HOW MUCH *WHINING* CAN ONE GUY DO?

YOU CALL *THIS* A BURDEN?

BEING SPIDEY SET ME *FREE!* GAVE MY LIFE *PURPOSE* AND *MEANING!*

AND Y'KNOW WHAT *ELSE?*

IT'S FUN!

YEAH? AND HOW MANY PEOPLE *PAID THE PRICE* FOR YOUR "FUN"?

HOW MANY PEOPLE DIED THAT SPIDER-MAN COULD HAVE...*SHOULD* HAVE... PROTECTED?

STARTING WITH *UNCLE BEN.* AND THEN *CAPTAIN STACY. GWEN* AND--

NO! I-IT'S NOT *MY FAULT!* IT'S--

YOU SEEK TO *LAY BLAME* AT SOMEONE'S FEET?

RUN CHHH H

UH-OH.

TREES--TOPPLING IN THE DISTANCE.

THAT NOXIOUS SCENT. SO SICKENING. SO FAMILIAR.

K R A S S H H

THEN BY ALL MEANS--

AND THAT VOICE: CRUEL. CONTEMPTUOUS.

I KNOW IT. KNOW *HIM.*

THE CREATURE THAT'S BEEN HUNTING ME, *HAUNTING* ME, FOR WEEKS.

--LAY IT AT *MINE.*

THE SPIDER.

"*DOCTOR KAFKA... THIS IS MARY JANE. PETER PARKER'S WIFE.*"

I'VE BEEN TRYING YOU ALL NIGHT, BUT *EVERY TIME,* I GET YOUR MACHINE. WHY THE HELL DON'T YOU *PICK UP?* WHY--?

I'M SORRY. IT'S JUST THAT I'M SO WORRIED. Y'SEE, PETER, HE--

HE'S BEEN GOING *THROUGH* SOMETHING. SOMETHING *BAD.*

I KNOW YOU'VE HELPED HIM IN THE PAST, AND I'VE BEEN *BEGGING* HIM TO CALL YOU--BUT HE WON'T LISTEN.

AND NOW... NOW I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE HE IS. HE COULD BE *DEAD.* HE COULD BE--

PLEASE, DOCTOR--CALL ME BACK WHEN YOU GET THIS.

PLEASE.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE ELSE TO TURN. WHAT ELSE TO DO.

IF ONLY WE HAD FRIENDS HERE IN *PORTLAND.* IF ONLY--

WAIT.

TRACY MAKEBA. WE HARDLY KNOW EACH OTHER, BUT SHE AND PETER SEEM TO HAVE A STRONG CONNECTION.

AND TRACY WAS KIND TO US... TO *ME*...THAT NIGHT SHE HAD US OVER FOR DINNER.

SHE'D HELP, I *KNOW* SHE WOULD. I KNOW--

ANOTHER DAMN MACHINE.

SO WHAT DO I DO?

YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS IN THERE, MUNCHKIN?

SHOULD I JUST WAIT AROUND, LIKE SOME DUMB, DUTIFUL--

--ANXIOUS WRECK OF A WIFE?

OR DO I HOLD ON TO FAITH AND TRUST--

--THE WAY AUNT MAY ALWAYS DID?

Y'KNOW, THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO SAW HER AS A FRAGILE OLD WORRY-WART--

--BUT THEY WERE WRONG. MAY PARKER WAS THE STRONGEST WOMAN I EVER KNEW.

SHE FACED HER SHARE OF TRAGEDIES...AND SHE DIDN'T JUST SURVIVE THEM--

--SHE TRIUMPHED OVER THEM--

--AGAIN AND AGAIN.

AND SHE DID IT BY HOLDING ON TO HER FAITH--AND BELIEVING IN THE ESSENTIAL GOODNESS OF PEOPLE--

--NO MATTER HOW MUCH THE WORLD TRIED TO CONVINCE HER OTHERWISE. AND BECAUSE OF HER--

--YOUR DAD BELIEVES THAT TOO. ME?

I'M NOT SO SURE.

OKAY, MAY, I'LL TRY IT YOUR WAY: FAITH. TRUST. BELIEF. BUT I SWEAR, IF PETER'S NOT HOME SOON...

...I'M GOING *AFTER* HIM.

OUT OF THE WAY, PARKER-- AND LET *ME* HANDLE THIS!

YES, BY ALL MEANS... "HANDLE" IT. "HANDLE" *ME*.

AND LEARN, TO YOUR EVERLASTING REGRET, THAT I AM... THAT I ALWAYS *HAVE* BEEN--

WAK!

--YOUR *MASTER!*

WHATEVER FACE YOU WEAR... WHATEVER NAME YOU MAY CALL YOURSELF--

--YOU'RE MERELY A PAWN!

NO!

OH... *YES!*

I HAVE CHOSEN YOU... POSSESSED YOU... *USED* YOU TO SPREAD MY POISON ACROSS THE WORLD--

--AS I HAVE WITH SO MANY *OTHER* VESSELS DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES!

SWOK!

AND PERHAPS IT IS TIME NOW... TO SELECT A *NEW* VESSEL! AND LEAVE YOU HERE TO *DIE*--

--IN THIS *CESSPOOL* YOU CALL A MIND!

ORISHA... *HELP* ME!

I CANNOT SAVE YOU, PETER. ALL I CAN DO IS *OPEN THE DOOR* TO HEALING.

YOU HAVE TO WALK THROUGH--

--ON YOUR *OWN.*

I FEEL THE SPIDER'S CONSCIOUSNESS PULSING, *WRITHING,* ALL AROUND ME. DRAGGING ME DOWN.

DEVOURING ME.

I LOOK TO THE OTHER ONE...THE OTHER *ME*...FOR SALVATION...

...BUT HE'S *DYING.*

AND I'M *ALONE.*

BUT...BUT HAVEN'T I *ALWAYS* BEEN ALONE?

SPIDER-MAN ISN'T SOME SEPARATE ENTITY. SOMETHING THAT EXISTS *OUTSIDE* MYSELF.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE...MASK *ON* OR MASK *OFF...*

...I'M *PETER PARKER.*

AND I'VE STRUGGLED, ALL MY LIFE, TO DO MY BEST. TO *HELP* PEOPLE.

HAVE I FAILED? YES. SOMETIMES MORE THAN I'VE SUCCEEDED. BUT IT'S THE *TRYING,* I THINK, THAT DEFINES US.

THAT MAKES US *HUMAN.*

THERE...THERE *IS* NO SPIDER. NO ANCIENT, EVIL ENTITY.

INDEED. THAT WAS *KRAVEN'S* DELUSION. KRAVEN'S *MADNESS.*

HE COULDN'T EXPLAIN THE TERRIBLE TRAGEDIES HE'D KNOWN IN HIS LIFE, SO HIS TROUBLED MIND CREATED A MONSTER--

--AND *PROJECTED* IT ONTO YOU.

AND A PART OF ME...BURIED DEEP... *BELIEVED* IT.

MADE IT A SYMBOL OF ALL THE TRAGEDIES IN MY *OWN* LIFE.

AND GREGOR *MAGNIFIED* THAT BELIEF. USED IT AGAINST YOU.

I AM THE SPIDER! I WILL CONSUME YOU! I WILL--

YOU'LL DO NOTHING.

BECAUSE *YOU'RE NOT REAL.*

GONE. *FOREVER,* I HOPE.

AND AS THE THING VANISHES, I CAN ACTUALLY *FEEL* MY BONES MENDING. WOUNDS SWIFTLY *HEALING.*

HOW... HOW ARE YOU *DOING* THIS?

I LEARNED THIS TRUTH LONG AGO, PETER: HEAL THE *SPIRIT--*

--AND THE BODY WILL FOLLOW.

TRACY--

--ORISHA--

--WHO *ARE* YOU...?

A FRIEND.

AND A *MOTHER--*

--WHO HOPES TO REDEEM HER FALLEN SON.

I HEARD YOU SAY BEFORE THAT YOU WERE GREGOR'S MOTHER.

BUT THAT'S *IMPOSSIBLE!* YOU'RE NOT MUCH OLDER THAN I AM! YOU--

WHAT I *APPEAR* TO BE...AND WHAT I *AM*...ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT--

PETER...?

ARRRRHHH...

WHATEVER IT IS, I CAN *HELP* YOU! I CAN--

SWAP!

PETER-- *COME BACK!*

BLACK ICE

PETER!

IT'S AS IF HIS MIND HAS SHATTERED INTO A THOUSAND RAZOR-SHARP FRAGMENTS.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND! HOW COULD THE HEALING CEREMONY--

--GO SO TERRIBLY *WRONG?*

DON'T LOOK *SHOCKED,* MOTHER.

I DON'T NEED TO BE A MIND READER TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. AS FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO *PARKER--*

I SIMPLY ADDED SOME... *TOXIC* ELEMENTS TO YOUR MIX OF SACRED HERBS AND FLOWERS.

BUT *HOW--?*

YOU THINK YOU HID YOURSELF SO CLEVERLY. BUT I KNEW YOU WERE HERE, WATCHING. *WAITING* FOR ME.

AND ONE NIGHT, I SLIPPED PAST YOUR DEFENSES. SLID, UNDETECTED, BENEATH YOUR *PSYCHIC SCREENS.*

BUT NO ONE HAS *EVER--*

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN OVERCONFIDENT. AND YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD A *BLIND SPOT* WHERE *I'M* CONCERNED.

PLEASE, TAKHAR--SERGEI KRAVINOFF IS *DEAD!*

LET THIS INSANE QUEST FOR REVENGE MOLDER IN THE GRAVE ALONG *WITH* HI--

ROAR

RIP

GOODBYE, MOTHER.

I GO NOW TO *FINISH* THE WORK YOU INTERRUPTED. THE HUNT--

--ENDS TONIGHT.

KRA-KOOOOM!

HOW LONG CAN I LIE HERE STARING AT THE CEILING...

...WORRYING ABOUT HIM?

BABY'S KICKING UP A STORM LIKE *SHE'S* WORRIED TOO.

WELL, ENOUGH'S *ENOUGH.* I'M GONNA GET DRESSED, GET IN THE CAR AND--

AND *WHAT,* MARY JANE?

DRIVE AROUND THE WHOLE DAMN CITY? POKE YOUR HEAD IN EVERY ALLEY? SCOUR EVERY ROOFTO--?

KRASH!

WHAT THE HELL WAS *THAT?*

SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE'S IN THE HOUSE.

A BREAK-IN?

OR COULD IT BE--

--PETER...?

RRRRRRRRR...

RYAN BROWN
—22—

PETER...?

HRRRRRR

WHAT'S *HAPPENED* TO HIM?

SPIDER-MAN: THE LOST HUNT
CHAPTER FOUR: ORISHA'S TALE

HE DOESN'T RECOGNIZE ME. I DON'T THINK HE EVEN KNOWS *HIMSELF.*

IT'S AS IF HE'S LOST IN SOME INNER WORLD OF PAIN...

...AND IT'S TEARING HIM APART.

THESE PAST WEEKS, PETER'S BEEN WRESTLING WITH SOMETHING SO DARK, SO DEEP, IT'S BEEN *IMPOSSIBLE* TO GET THROUGH TO HIM.

THEN TONIGHT, WHEN HE DIDN'T COME HOME, I WAS WORRIED SOMETHING *TERRIBLE* HAD HAPPENED.

BUT WHATEVER TRAGEDIES I IMAGINED...

...I NEVER EXPECTED *THIS.*

HNNNGG

PETER-- WHAT ARE YOU *DOING?*

YOU DON'T HAVE YOUR *POWERS* ANYMORE! YOU CAN'T *CLIMB WALLS!* YOU CAN'T--

THUD

HE'S WHIMPERING...

...LIKE A FRIGHTENED *ANIMAL.*

BEWILDERED. *LOST.*

AND HOWEVER TERRIFIED I AM...

...I'M *HIS WIFE...*

...AND I HAVE TO DO *EVERYTHING* I CAN...

...TO BRING HIM BACK.

WHERE *ARE* YOU, PARKER?

I FEEL YOUR MIND...LIKE SHATTERED GLASS...GLEAMING FRAGMENTS SCATTERED ACROSS THE RIVER BELOW.

I FEEL YOUR *TERROR.* YOUR *ANGER.* YOUR *CONFUSION.*

AND I'M *SO SORRY.*

I DID MY BEST TO HEAL YOU--AND I THOUGHT I'D SUCCEEDED. BUT GREGOR UNDID MY DELICATE WORK. POISONED YOU. HE--

GREGOR? NO. I MUSTN'T THINK OF HIM THAT WAY. GREGOR IS A FICTION CREATED BY *SERGEI KRAVINOFF.*

HIS NAME IS *TAKHAR...*

...AND HE IS *MY SON.*

A SON WHOSE ANIMAL FAMILIAR--THE LEOPARD, *MISHKIN*--MIGHT HAVE *KILLED* ME BACK AT THAT WAREHOUSE.

HE *WOULD* HAVE KILLED ME, HAD I BEEN A LESSER WOMAN.

BUT I AM *AJA ORISHA...*

...THE *HUNTER...*

SPLOOSH

...AND I AM NOT SO EASILY DEFEATED.

YES, PARKER-- I SEE YOU NOW.

AND I WILL FIND YOU BEFORE *HE* DOES.

I WILL *SAVE* YOU.

AND I PRAY TO THE GODS OF MY NATIVE LAND...

...THAT I CAN SAVE *TAKHAR* AS WELL.

BUT WILL THOSE GODS DEIGN TO LISTEN TO THE PRAYERS OF SOMEONE WHO TURNED AWAY FROM THEM...

...ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO?

OH, *MOTHER... FATHER*--WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF YOUR DAUGHTER IF YOU COULD SEE HER NOW?

YOU RAISED ME, IN OUR *WAKANDAN HOME,* WITH SUCH LOVE. SUCH EXTRAORDINARY TENDERNESS.

AND I KNOW IT BROKE BOTH YOUR HEARTS WHEN *UMAMA ASASE* CAME...

...AND TOOK ME *AWAY* FROM YOU.

IT WAS AN *HONOR,* YOU SAID, CURBING YOUR TEARS, TO HAVE YOUR BELOVED CHILD BECOME ONE OF THE *BALÚ-AYÉ...*

...A REVERED ORDER OF FEMALE MYSTICS, TASKED WITH PROVIDING *SPIRITUAL PROTECTION* TO WAKANDA.

THE BALÚ-AYÉ LIVED LIVES OF PRAYER AND MEDITATION, MASTERING THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES--AND IT WAS RUMORED THAT THEY WERE NEARLY IMMORTAL.

ASASE HERSELF WAS SAID TO BE OVER *FOUR CENTURIES* OLD.

"ONE IN A GENERATION," MY FATHER EXPLAINED TO ME, EYES ALIGHT WITH BOTH PRIDE AND GRIEF, "IS INVITED TO JOIN THEIR COMMUNITY."

I WAS A CHILD OF 7. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. HOW *COULD* I? SO I WEPT BITTER TEARS, TOOK ASASE'S HAND, AND LEFT MY FAMILY BEHIND.

I NEVER SAW THEM AGAIN.

PETER... I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG. I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF YOU CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING.

BUT IT'S *ME.* IT'S *MARY JANE.*

I'M *RIGHT HERE* WITH YOU, MY LOVE. AND I'M NOT GOING *ANYWHERE.*

THE BALÚ-AYE LIVED IN A TEMPLE, CARVED INTO A TOWERING MOUNTAIN, IN THE HIDDEN HEART OF WAKANDA.

HOW *ALONE* I FELT IN THOSE EARLY DAYS. HEARTSICK AND AFRAID. BUT UMAMA AND THE SISTERS WERE KIND, GENTLE, AND, AS THE MONTHS PASSED...

...I CAME TO *LOVE* OUR STRANGE, SECLUDED LIFE.

THEY TAUGHT ME HEALING ARTS THAT WERE *OLD* WHEN TIME ITSELF WAS *YOUNG*. OPENED DOORS TO REALMS THAT EXISTED NOT IN THE *PHYSICAL* WORLD...

...BUT IN *THE DEEPS OF MY OWN SOUL.*

I DANCED WITH ABANDON BEFORE THE GODS. LOST MYSELF IN SPIRITUAL ECSTASIES.

OUR PRAYERS AND RITUALS, MANTRAS AND INCANTATIONS, ECHOED FAR BEYOND OUR ISOLATED MOUNTAIN, ENGULFING ALL OF WAKANDA. SAFEGUARDING OUR PEOPLE. HEALING THE SOUL OF A NATION.

AND I WAS CONTENT...

...UNTIL I *WASN'T.*

INNER JOURNEYS, IT SEEMED, WERE NOT ENOUGH. A PART OF ME LONGED FOR A LIFE *BEYOND* THE WALLS OF OUR CAVE-CATHEDRAL.

WHAT LIES *OUT THERE?* I WONDERED. NOT JUST IN WAKANDA, BUT IN THE WIDER WORLD?

I STRUGGLED TO *REPRESS* THAT PART OF MYSELF. *DENY* IT.

AND TIME PASSED.

ON MY EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY, I TOOK MY FINAL VOWS. "ARE YOU READY," ASASE ASKED, "TO BEGIN THE THE *YĀŃSĀN-ĀN RITUAL?* TO FULLY RENOUNCE THE LIFE YOU ONCE KNEW-- AND BE *REBORN* AS BALÚ-AYÉ?"

I NODDED.

"THEN CHEW THE SACRED HERBS, MY DAUGHTER. DRINK THE SACRED POTION.

"AND *DIE.*"

FOR *TWO WEEKS* I LAY BURIED: MY BODY STILL, UNBREATHING. BUT WITHIN *MY MIND...*

...I RACED ACROSS PSYCHIC SAVANNAS, EMBARKING ON A *GREAT HUNT.* THE PREY?

MY OWN INNER DEMONS.

TIME AND AGAIN, I SLEW THEM. TIME AND AGAIN, THEY ROSE UP, MORE SAVAGE THAN BEFORE...

...UNTIL, AT LAST, I SAW THAT VIOLENCE WAS NOT THE WAY OF *THIS* HUNT.

NO, I HAD TO *HONOR* MY DEMONS, *ACKNOWLEDGE* THEIR VALUE, *MAKE PEACE* WITH THEM. AND ONLY THEN...

...WOULD MY RESURRECTION BE *COMPLETE.*

YOU'RE *LOST,* PETER. *TRAUMATIZED.* BUT A PART OF YOU KNEW ENOUGH TO COME *HOME* TO ME.

TO THE PERSON WHO *LOVES* YOU MORE THAN ANYONE. WHO *KNOWS* YOU--

--BETTER THAN YOU KNOW *YOURSELF.*

BUT TO HONOR MY DEMONS MEANT HONORING THE ***WANDERLUST*** IN MY SOUL-- AND THE GROWING CERTAINTY THAT MY DESTINY WAS NOT TO BE FOUND AMONG THE BALÚ-AYÉ.

IT TOOK NEARLY A YEAR BEFORE I SUMMONED THE COURAGE TO STAND BEFORE ASASE AND ASK TO BE RELEASED FROM THE ORDER.

"THE LAW IS CLEAR," UMAMA SAID, HER VOICE BOTH FIERCE AND TENDER. "IF YOU DO THIS, IT IS NOT JUST THE BALÚ-AYÉ YOU LEAVE BEHIND. IT IS ***WAKANDA ITSELF.***

"AND YOU CAN ***NEVER RETURN.***"

FOR ***FORTY DAYS,*** I SAT WITHIN A SACRED CIRCLE, DEEP IN MEDITATION, PONDERING MY FUTURE.

ON THE FORTY-FIRST MORNING, I ROSE, BOWED BEFORE UMAMA ASASE, EMBRACED MY SISTERS, AND LEFT THE TEMPLE...

...THE MOURNFUL SONG OF THE BALÚ-AYÉ ***TEARING*** AT MY HEART.

BUT MOURNING BECAME DARK ***WONDER...***

...AS I EXPLORED THE WORLD I'D DREAMED OF FOR SO LONG. FIRST, A DECADE ON THE ***AFRICAN CONTINENT***--THEN ON TO ***ASIA*** AND ***EUROPE.***

WAKANDA HAD BEEN A KIND OF ***PARADISE,*** BUT OUT THERE, I ENCOUNTERED PAIN, SUFFERING, BRUTALITY--ON A SCALE BOTH HUMBLING AND TERRIFYING.

I SAW PEOPLE ENSLAVED AND HUMILIATED BY COLONIZING SADISTS. SAW WARS WAGED, MILLIONS SLAUGHTERED, SO THAT ONE FLAG COULD SUPPLANT ANOTHER.

MANY A TORTURED NIGHT I REGRETTED MY CHOICES, ***CURSING*** MYSELF FOR A NAIVE FOOL. BUT THE DOOR TO WAKANDA WAS FOREVER CLOSED TO ME: ALL I COULD DO WAS ***GO ON.*** AND EVENTUALLY...

...I DISCOVERED SOMETHING ELSE--BEYOND THE CRUELTY AND BARBARISM: A KIND OF ***GRACE.*** A STRIVING FOR GREATNESS. FOR TRUTH, HOPE, AND MEANING. AND A VIBRANT LOVE MADE ***STRONGER*** BY ADVERSITY.

SO THE LONG YEARS PASSED, AND I ROSE AND FELL, FAILED AND TRIUMPHED, WEPT...

YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH ***SO MUCH,*** PETER. LOSING YOUR ***PARENTS.*** YOUR ***UNCLE BEN. GWEN. HARRY. AUNT MAY.***

WHEN YOU WERE ***SPIDER-MAN,*** YOU PUT YOUR OWN HAPPINESS ASIDE AGAIN AND AGAIN--

--READY TO ***GIVE YOUR LIFE*** FOR PEOPLE YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW.

PEOPLE WHO ***FEARED*** YOU. ***HATED*** YOU.

...AND KNEW *UNCOMMON JOY.*

Hear me, you imprisoned beasts. You lost and luckless creatures.

Let ***my*** thoughts become yours.

My ***rage*** fill your breasts. My ***hatred***...

...give...

...you...

...strength.

IN 1921, I REACHED THE BEATING HEART OF THE WESTERN WORLD. THE CONCRETE EMBODIMENT OF HUMANKIND'S MAD, GLORIOUS DUALITY...

...NEW YORK CITY.

I'D BUILT AN IMPRESSIVE FORTUNE IN MY YEARS OF WANDERING--AND IT ALLOWED ME ENTRY INTO THE HIGHEST ECHELONS OF NEW YORK SOCIETY.

BUT FOR ALL THEIR HONEYED WORDS, I KNEW IT WAS ***WEALTH ALONE*** THAT DREW THOSE SELF-STYLED ELITES TO ME.

A BLACK WOMAN WHO WASN'T A SERVANT? WHO DIDN'T CATER TO THEIR EVERY WHIM? TO THEM, I WAS AN ODDITY. A CURIOSITY.

I ENDURED IT, ENDURED ***THEM,*** IN THE NAME OF BUSINESS. BUT WHEN I SOUGHT ***TRUE*** COMMUNITY...

...I WENT TO ***HARLEM...***

...HAUNTING THE NIGHTCLUBS, LISTENING TO JAZZ, TALKING TILL DAWN WITH PAINTERS AND NOVELISTS, POETS AND ACTIVISTS...

...AND MEETING THE LOVE OF MY LIFE: ***DR. HENRY MCKAY.***

MANY A MAN, MANY A WOMAN, HAD STOLEN MY HEART SINCE I'D LEFT WAKANDA. BUT HENRY? HE CAPTURED MY ***SOUL.***

WE WERE MARRIED THREE WEEKS AFTER WE MET. HE DIED, SUDDENLY, TWO MONTHS LATER. AND HE BEQUEATHED ME TWO THINGS:

HENRY MCKAY

UNSPEAKABLE ***GRIEF--*** AND OUR SON, ***TAKHAR.***

I WAS A MESS WHEN WE MET--HIDING MY PAIN BEHIND FLIPPANT REMARKS AND FAKE SMILES.

BUT YOU FOUND ME, PETER. THE ***REAL*** ME. AND, ***THANK GOD--***

--I FOUND ***YOU.***

I HID BEHIND THE WALLS OF MY MANSION FOR MORE THAN A YEAR.

TAKHAR BECAME THE CENTER OF MY UNIVERSE: WITHOUT THAT SWEET CHILD, MY GRIEF MIGHT HAVE TURNED TO ***MADNESS.***

BUT I EVENTUALLY FELT THE CALL OF THE WORLD, OF WOUNDED HEARTS LIKE MY OWN...

...AND I BEGAN TO VISIT THE ***TENEMENTS,*** MINISTERING TO THE POOR, USING THE BALŪ-AYÉ HEALING ARTS TO AID THE IGNORED AND FORGOTTEN.

BUT SICKNESS AND SORROW WEREN'T EXCLUSIVE TO THE SLUMS...

...AS I WAS REMINDED WHEN I ENCOUNTERED AN EXILED RUSSIAN NOBLEMAN NAMED ***SERGEI KRAVINOFF.*** HE EXUDED CONFIDENCE, HUBRIS...

...BUT I COULD SEE THE GHOSTS THAT HAUNTED HIM: THE FAMILY THAT LOST ALL IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION.

THE FATHER WHO DROWNED IN DRINK. THE MOTHER, INSTITUTIONALIZED.

DEAD BY HER ***OWN HAND.***

JUST AS UMAMU ASASE HAD ONCE SEEN THE POTENTIAL IN ME, I SAW THE SEEDS OF SOMETHING GREAT IN SERGEI.

WAS IT COMPASSION THAT MOTIVATED ME? ARROGANCE? OR PERHAPS, I SIMPLY NEEDED A ***FRIEND.*** WHATEVER THE CASE...

...I WELCOMED KRAVINOFF INTO MY LIFE.

TAKHAR AND SERGEI BONDED INSTANTLY. DESPERATE FOR A FATHER FIGURE, THE BOY ***WORSHIPPED*** HIM FROM THE START. AND THAT WORSHIP...

...SOWED THE SEEDS OF OUR UNDOING.

AS THE GREAT DEPRESSION TOOK HOLD IN AMERICA, WE TRAVELED BACK TO *AFRICA*--WHERE I HOPED TO SHARE THE WISDOM I'D IMBIBED AMONG MY WAKANDAN SISTERS. AND SO...

...WE BEGAN THE GREAT HUNT...

"THE BEASTS WE PURSUE," I TOLD HIM, "ACROSS THESE VELDTS AND FORESTS ARE MERELY *SYMBOLS* OF THE BEASTS THAT DWELL WITHIN YOUR OWN *HEART.*

"*THEY* ARE YOUR TEACHERS AS MUCH AS I--AND ARE *NEVER* TO BE HARMED."

THE LESSON DIDN'T ALWAYS TAKE.

BUT DESPITE THESE ABERRATIONS, I BELIEVED I COULD BRING SERGEI BACK FROM THE INNER ABYSS. THAT WITH MY HELP...

...HE COULD *SLAY* THE INNER DEMONS THAT DROVE HIM TO BLOOD AND BRUTALITY...

OUR LOVE SAVED ME, PETER. IT SAVED US BOTH. AND IT WILL SAVE US AGAIN.

IT'S A CORD OF LIGHT AND HOPE THAT ALWAYS CONNECTS YOU TO ME--AND TO *OUR CHILD.*

HOLD *TIGHT* TO IT, PETER--AND *DON'T LET GO.*

...AND BE *REBORN.*

ONCE, I HAD BEEN BURIED ALONE IN A GRAVE WITH *MY* DEMONS. AND FROM THAT ORDEAL I'D RISEN, *TRANSFORMED...*

...CONNECTED TO SOMETHING *BIGGER* THAN MYSELF. SOMETHING *HUGE* AND *SACRED.*

THAT WAS MY HOPE, MY *PRAYER,* FOR SERGEI...

...AS WE LEFT AFRICA BEHIND--AND RETURNED TO AN ESTATE I OWNED, A HUNDRED MILES NORTH OF NEW YORK CITY. AND IT WAS THERE I INITIATED...

...THE *YAŃSĂN-ĂN RITUAL.*

SERGEI CHEWED THE SACRED HERBS. DRANK THE SACRED POTION.

SERGEI *DIED.*

HE SHOULD HAVE REMAINED IN THE DARK, IN THE DUST, FOR TWO WEEKS, BUT HE LASTED ONLY *FOUR DAYS.* WERE HIS DEMONS TOO FIERCE, TOO WRATHFUL, TOO WILD...

...OR WAS HE SIMPLY *TOO WEAK* TO CONFRONT THEM? TO MAKE PEACE WITH THEM?

HE BURST OUT OF THE EARTH IN A STATE OF FEBRILE MADNESS. WE STRUGGLED FOR HOURS BEFORE I SUBDUED HIM...

...AND IT TOOK MORE THAN A MONTH TO GENTLY NURSE HIM BACK TO A SEMBLANCE OF HEALTH.

TAKHAR BLAMED *ME* FOR KRAVINOFF'S COLLAPSE. WHY, HE ASKED, WOULD I PUT SERGEI *THROUGH* THIS? WHY WOULD I HURT THIS MAN HE SO ADMIRED AND LOVED?

MY JUSTIFICATIONS WERE DISMISSED WITH CONTEMPT, AND MY SON DREW *CLOSER* TO THE ONLY FATHER HE'D EVER KNOWN...

...AND *FURTHER* FROM ME.

I COULD NOT BLAME HIM.

SERGEI, TOO, TURNED AWAY. HIS MIND, ALREADY UNSTABLE, TEETERED NOW ON THE PRECIPICE OF MADNESS.

HE BECAME CONVINCED THAT I'D BEEN HIS ENEMY ALL ALONG--THAT MY GOAL HAD NOT BEEN TO HEAL, BUT TO ***MOCK*** AND ***TORMENT*** HIM.

AND HE ***LEFT*** US--DISAPPEARING FOR MONTHS AT A TIME. WHERE HE WENT, WHAT HE DID, I NEVER LEARNED--BUT HE ALWAYS RETURNED...

...FOR ***TAKHAR***--FILLING THE BOY'S HEAD WITH HIS DREAMS AND DELUSIONS:

TALES OF GRAND ADVENTURES--BOTH REAL AND IMAGINED. AND FINALLY, WHEN TAKHAR WAS NEARING HIS FIFTEENTH BIRTHDAY...

...SERGEI TOOK HIM ***AWAY*** FROM ME.

"I AM NOT YOURS," MY SON TOLD ME THAT NIGHT. "I AM ***HIS***. I AM NOT TAKHAR.

"I AM ***GREGOR KRAVINOFF.***"

I COULD HAVE STOPPED HIM, BUT HE WOULD HAVE RESENTED, DESPISED, ME ALL THE MORE. SO I ALLOWED THEM TO GO...

...ALWAYS KEEPING THEM IN SIGHT, AWARE OF THEIR WANDERINGS. AND BELIEVING THAT, IN TIME, TAKHAR WOULD REALIZE THE TRUTH AND COME ***HOME*** TO ME.

THE ***GREATEST TRAGEDY*** OF MY LIFE...

COME TO ME, PETER.

COME INTO MY ARMS.

COME HOME.

...IS THAT HE *NEVER DID.*

YEARS PASSED--AND I WATCHED AS KRAVINOFF WAS *INDEED* REBORN--BUT NOT AS THE MAN I'D HOPED. NO, HE BECAME A BRUTE, A BULLY, A MURDERER OF INNOCENT CREATURES...

...CALLED *KRAVEN THE HUNTER...*

...USURPING THE SACRED TEACHINGS OF THE BALÚ-AYE--THE VERY RITUALS I WAS USING TO REDEEM HIS TORTURED SOUL--AND *CORRUPTING* THEM.

SERGEI'S DESCENT INTO DEPRAVITY CONTINUED--MUTATING INTO A WARPED OBSESSION WITH *SPIDER-MAN.*

HE CAME TO SEE PETER PARKER NOT AS A HUMAN BEING...

...BUT AS *THE SPIDER:* THE SUPERNATURAL EMBODIMENT OF EVERYTHING THAT HAD GONE SO TERRIBLY WRONG IN HIS LIFE.

MANY TIMES, I TRIED TO INTERCEDE, MANY TIMES, I FAILED...

... BUT MY MOST ABJECT FAILURE CAME WHEN KRAVEN *PERVERTED* THE YÄŃSÄN-ĀN RESURRECTION RITUAL...

...USING IT AS A *WEAPON* AGAINST SPIDER-MAN--BURYING HIM IN THE GROUND FOR TWO TORTUROUS WEEKS.

SERGEI HOPED THAT PARKER WOULD FAIL AS HE HAD, THAT THE YÄŃSÄN-ĀN WOULD *DESTROY* THE SPIDER. AND PERHAPS, IN KRAVEN'S UNHINGED MIND...

...THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED.

BUT IF HIS TRIUMPH WAS SO GREAT--WHY, THEN, DID SERGEI FOLLOW HIS MOTHER'S ILL-FATED PATH...

...AND *TAKE HIS OWN LIFE?*

AND THROUGH IT ALL, TAKHAR... *GREGOR*...WAS BY HIS SIDE. THROUGH IT ALL, THE TOXIC KRAVINOFF LEGACY...

...INFECTED MY CHILD'S SOUL.

THAT IS A BURDEN I MUST BEAR. THAT...

SLOOSH

...AND *SO MUCH MORE.*

I SOUGHT ONLY TO HEAL A FRIEND, BUT MY OWN NEEDS *BLINDED* ME. AND FOR THE REST OF MY DAYS I'LL WONDER:

IF I'D UNDERSTOOD SOONER HOW *DEEP* SERGEI'S MADNESS RAN--COULD I HAVE *SAVED* HIM?

SAVED THEM *BOTH?*

...MMMM...

...MARY...

MARY JANE.

YOU *DID* IT.

YOU BROUGHT ME *HOME.*

ALWAYS, PETER.

ALWAYS.

THIS HEALING IS A MIRACLE. YOUR LOVE, A BLESSING. BUT SADLY--

--THERE'S *NO TIME* FOR CELEBRATION.

TRACY...?

NO. HER REAL NAME IS *AJA ORISHA,* AND SHE'S--

EXPLAIN IT TO HER LATER. GREGOR IS ON HIS WAY, AND YOU HAVE TO FIND *SAFE GROUND* BEFORE--

DAMN.

IT'S *TOO LATE.*

"HE'S HERE."

ONE WAY

PARKING
RYAN BROWN
22

"GREGOR IS HERE--"

SPIDER-MAN: THE LOST HUNT
CHAPTER FIVE: THE CAULDRON

--AND YOU TWO HAVE TO GO... *NOW!*

BUT GREGOR--

I'LL DEAL WITH MY *SON.*

I...I CAN'T JUST RUN, *ORISHA!* GREGOR'S HERE BECAUSE OF *ME!* HE BLAMES ME FOR *SERGEI AND VLADIMIR'S DEATHS--*

--AND I HAVE A *RESPONSIBILITY* TO--

TO YOUR *WIFE AND CHILD.*

GO TO MY HOUSE. THERE'S A *SAFE ROOM* IN THE BASEMENT WHERE *MARY JANE* WILL BE PROTECTED.

I KNOW YOU WANT TO STAY, *PETER--*

--BUT YOU'RE NOT *SPIDER-MAN* ANYMORE.

YOU *JUST* CAME BACK TO ME...HALF-CRAZY, BRUISED, AND BLOODY. *GREGOR* DID THAT TO YOU--

--AND I'M NOT GONNA LET HIM *FINISH THE JOB.*

ONCE YOUR WIFE IS SAFE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO HELP.

HOW?

WHEN THE TIME COMES, *YOU'LL KNOW.* NOW GO--OUT THE BACK--

"--BEFORE IT'S *TOO LATE."*

I SEE YOU'VE RECOVERED FROM OUR EARLIER ENCOUNTER. I'M NOT SURPRISED.

YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD A *KNACK* FOR SURVIVAL.

I'LL GIVE YOU *ONE FINAL CHANCE* TO *STOP* THIS INSANITY.

AH, MOTHER... THE INSANITY--

--HAS JUST BEGUN!

THESE PAST WEEKS HAVE BEEN A NIGHTMARE. PETER WITHDRAWING INTO HIMSELF...PULLING AWAY FROM ME. AND I SEE NOW THAT IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF *HIM*.

GREGOR.

HE'S HERE TO FINISH WHAT *KRAVEN THE HUNTER* BEGAN YEARS AGO, WHEN HE *BURIED PETER ALIVE* AND--

NO. I CAN'T EVEN *THINK* ABOUT IT.

PETER MADE IT THROUGH THAT ORDEAL. *WE* MADE IT THROUGH.

AND WE'LL MAKE IT THROUGH *THIS.*

BUT *AJA ORISHA*... WHO *IS* SHE? WE THOUGHT HER NAME WAS *TRACY MAKEBA*...

...A VISITING PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY WHERE PETER WORKS.

KRAAK!

BUT THAT WAS CLEARLY A *LIE.*

ORISHA CLAIMS SHE WANTS TO HELP US-- BUT HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT HER AGENDA *REALLY* IS?

GROWRR

HOW DO WE KNOW SHE'S NOT AN EVEN *BIGGER* THREAT...

...THAN HER *SON?*

YOU PROTECT *THE SPIDER,* MOTHER.

LAVISH MORE CARE AND ATTENTION ON PARKER THAN YOU EVER DID ON *ME.*

I ASK *WHY?*

THE ANSWER IS *SIMPLE.*

I NEVER MATTERED TO YOU!

KR

AK!

YOU WERE RELIEVED... *JOYFUL*...WHEN SERGEI TOOK ME AWAY!

I KNOW KRAVINOFF *CORRUPTED* YOUR MIND...TURNED YOU *AGAINST* ME, BUT EVEN SO--

--YOU CAN'T *POSSIBLY* BELIEVE THAT!

THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU EVER *COME* FOR ME?

DON'T YOU REMEMBER, *TAKHAR?* I *DID* COME! BUT SERGEI--

MY NAME IS *NOT* TAKHAR! MY NAME--

--IS GREGOR!

HE'S *LOST* TO ME. AND PERHAPS...

...IT *IS* MY FAULT.

WHAT I DO NOW, MOTHER, I DO FOR *YOU* AS WELL.

FOR IF I DON'T SLAY THE SPIDER THAT LIVES WITHIN PETER PARKER--

I WANTED TO GIVE TAKHAR THE *FREEDOM* HE SO CRAVED.

--THAT ANCIENT ENTITY WILL *CONSUME US ALL.*

THOUGHT, WITH TIME, MY CHILD WOULD *SEE THROUGH* KRAVINOFF'S LIES AND DELUSIONS.

I WAS WRONG.

DID I MISJUDGE TAKHAR? MISJUDGE *MYSELF?* WHATEVER THE ANSWER, THIS TRAGEDY...

...IS OF *MY* MAKING--AND IT'S TIME FOR ME TO *ATONE.* TIME FOR ME TO--

HRRROOOOW!

GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD, AJA!

TAKHAR'S WILL CONTROLS THESE INNOCENT CREATURES AND, FOR THEIR SAKE AND MINE...

TOOOOM!

ROAW WW RR

GROWWRR

...I HAVE TO FREE THEM FROM HIS VENOMOUS INFLUENCE. BUT *FIRST*--

SLEEP.

THE OTHERS COME FOR ME-- *BOILING* WITH TAKHAR'S RAGE...

...BUT I WILL NOT ALLOW HIS ANGER TO CONSUME THEM.

SO I CHANT THE ANCIENT MANTRA, SING THE ANCIENT SONG THAT I LEARNED SO LONG AGO IN *WAKANDA*...

...AMONG MY SISTERS OF THE *BALÚ-AYÉ*.

NOT A SONG OF MANIPULATION.

A SONG OF *RESPECT*...

...AND SACRED COMMUNION.

GO NOW... INTO THE NIGHT... SAFE AND PROTECTED.

RETURN TO YOUR HABITAT AND NONE WILL KNOW--

--THAT YOU WERE EVER--

SKRAWWWK

YOU FORGOT THE VULTURE-- DIDN'T YOU, MOTHER?

HER CLAWS DIPPED IN A POTENCY...HAD I INCREASED THE POTENCY...WOULD HAVE KILLED YOU.

BUT, JUST THIS ONCE, I WILL BE AS MERCIFUL TO YOU AS YOU WERE TO THESE BEASTS.

"JUST THIS ONCE."

HE WANTS TO RUN, I *KNOW* HE DOES. BACK TO ORISHA. BACK TO THE BATTLE.

SHE SAID YOU'D BE SAFE HERE.

ALWAYS THE SACRIFICING HERO. I *LOVE* THAT ABOUT PETER. AND...I'M ASHAMED TO *ADMIT* IT...

...I *HATE* IT TOO.

HATE THINKING ABOUT MANIACS LIKE GREGOR CONSTANTLY UPENDING OUR LIVES. WORRYING ABOUT THE DAY WHEN THEY FINALLY MAKE ME A *WIDOW.*

I HOPE SHE'S *RIGHT.*

BUT AJA'S JUST *RENTING* THIS PLACE.

WHAT COULD BE DOWN HERE THAT--?

WHAT *IS* ALL THIS?

IT'S BEEN LONELY SINCE WE CAME TO PORTLAND. A STRUGGLE TO FIND OUR FEET. BUILD A LIFE.

BUT IT'S ALSO BEEN A CHANCE FOR US TO FINALLY PUT SPIDER-MAN *BEHIND* US. AND I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER IF I'VE BEEN A *COMPLETE FOOL...*

THEY LOOK LIKE...*WAKANDAN ARTIFACTS.* TRADITIONAL CLOTHING. WEAPONS. STATUES OF THEIR *GODS.* AND WHAT'S THAT--

...TO BELIEVE THAT'S *POSSIBLE.*

--OVER THERE?

HE ASKED ORISHA HOW HE COULD HELP. "WHEN THE TIME COMES," SHE SAID, *"YOU'LL KNOW."*

AND WHEN HE SEES IT, GLEAMING IN THE SHADOWS-- HE *UNDERSTANDS* WHAT SHE MEANT.

I *BEG* HIM NOT TO PUT IT ON. TO STAY DOWN HERE WITH ME. BUT HE HAS TO DO IT. I *KNOW* HE DOES.

I HEARD YOUR *CALL*, MISHKIN! I'M *HERE!*

AND SO, I SEE--

SO ALL *I* CAN DO IS GIVE HIM A GENTLE KISS...

--IS *HE!*

...AND *WISH HIM WELL.*

ALL RIGHT, GREGOR--

--LET'S FINISH THIS!

I know that ancient armor, that *Dora Milaje spear,* from when I was a boy.

Part of the idiotic collection Mother dragged with us wherever we went. Both made with the thinnest layer of *vibranium...*

...one of the most *impenetrable substances* known to man. But she's *adapted* them for him.

Damn her Balú-Aye divinations!

FWAK!

She *knew* this encounter would come!

Prepared for it!

And, again, she favors *the spider...*

...over her *own son!*

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

YOU CAN HIDE BEHIND THAT ARMOR-- BUT IT WON'T *SAVE* YOU!

FOR TONIGHT, THE HUNT THAT KRAVEN BEGAN SO *LONG* AGO--

--COMES TO AN END!

YOU WIELD THAT WAKANDAN STAFF WITH SOME *SKILL*--

THWAK!

--BUT MY MOTHER'S NOT THE *ONLY* ONE WHO'S AMASSED AN IMPRESSIVE WEAPONS COLLECTION!

THIS *BLADE*, FOR INSTANCE--

SHAKK

--WAS FORGED FROM *VIBRANIUM*--

SLICE

--AND IT WILL *SEVER* THAT STAFF...*SLICE THROUGH* THAT ARMOR--

--AND THEN GUT YOU LIKE A HELPLESS FISH!

IT'S NOT A *WEAPON* THAT'S GOING TO WIN THIS FIGHT, GREGOR!

IT'S THE STRENGTH THAT COMES FROM MARY JANE'S *LOVE* FOR ME--

--AND MINE FOR *HER!*

IT'S THE *HOPE FOR THE FUTURE* WE BOTH SHARE! *OUR CHILD'S* FUTURE!

AND I'LL SEE YOU *DEAD*--

RRRRRR

--BEFORE I LET YOU TAKE THAT AWAY!

NO, MISHKIN.

YOU *MUST NOT* INTERFERE.

YOU *FEEL* IT, DON'T YOU-- IN THE DEPTHS OF YOUR WISE AND ANCIENT SOUL?

YOUR MASTER HAS A *DESTINY* TO PLAY OUT TONIGHT.

AS DOES PARKER.

"AS DO I."

THAK!

RAAAK!

TOOM!

NO.

DAMN YOU, SPIDER! WHY WON'T YOU *FINISH* THIS?

WHY WON'T YOU KILL ME?!

BECAUSE HE'S NOT SOME *CREATURE.* SOME... *SPIDER-THING* CREATED BY KRAVEN'S DEMENTED IMAGINATION.

HE'S JUST A *MAN.*

A GOOD AND DECENT MAN WHO'S RISKED HIS LIFE, *AGAIN AND AGAIN,* TO HELP PEOPLE HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW.

WHO, AFTER *EVERY TERRIBLE THING* YOU'VE DONE, WOULD RISK HIS LIFE--

--TO HELP YOU.

AND YOU'VE KNOWN IT ALL ALONG, HAVEN'T YOU?

BUT YOU HAD TO *PROJECT* YOUR HATE AND FEAR AND MISERY ONTO PETER--

--BECAUSE, IF YOU *DIDN'T*--

--YOU'D HAVE TO *FACE THE TRUTH*--

--ABOUT KRAVEN AND HIS SON. ABOUT *YOURSELF*. YOU'D HAVE TO--

SHUT UP!

I... I *SEE* NOW.

I DON'T HAVE TO KILL *YOU*, PARKER. I JUST HAVE TO TAKE YOUR *WIFE*--AND THE CHILD GROWING INSIDE HER.

AND THEN THE SAME *MASSIVE GRIEF* I'VE KNOWN SINCE YOU DROVE THE KRAVINOFFS TO THEIR GRAVES WILL *CONSUME* YOU.

AND THE SPIDER *WITHIN* YOU WILL WITHER...AND FINALLY--

-DIE!

MOTHER!

MOTHER... I DIDN'T MEAN--

I KNOW. THIS WAS DESTINY'S WORK...NOT YOURS.

IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO DISPEL THE DEMONS IN YOUR HEART--

--AND BRING MY BELOVED SON--

--BACK TO ME...

I...I'M SO SORRY, GREGOR.

MY NAME--IS TAKHAR!

And, at last, with painful clarity, I see myself...

THWAK!

...and my wasted life.

I betrayed my mother. My heritage.

And like that tortured madman I once worshipped...

...I don't deserve to live.

NO!

NOT AGAIN!

I COULDN'T STOP *KRAVEN* FROM TAKING HIS OWN LIFE--

--BUT I'M DAMN WELL GONNA STOP YOU!

KRAAAAK

I THINK, PERHAPS, YOU'RE *RIGHT*, PARKER. FOR ISN'T A LIFE OF INTOLERABLE GRIEF AND SHAME *FAR WORSE*--

--THAN A *COWARD'S GRAVE?*

I KNOW I CANNOT ASK YOUR FORGIVENESS FOR WHAT I'VE DONE--BUT I SWEAR TO YOU ON *AJA ORISHA'S SOUL*--

--THAT OUR WAR--

--IS *FINALLY OVER.*

MAY YOU BOTH KNOW THE PEACE...THE HEALING--

--THAT I *NEVER WILL.*

WHAT... WHAT DO WE DO *NOW?*

WE *LIVE OUR LIVES,* PETER.

YOU, ME, AND OUR CHILD.

WE *LIVE OUR LIVES.*

AND IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOW, THOSE WORDS...

...BECOME OUR *GUIDING STAR.*

IT TAKES TIME TO BEGIN TO SHAKE OFF THE TRAUMA AND TRAGEDY OF THAT AWFUL ENCOUNTER. AND, EVEN AS WE MOURN ORISHA'S PASSING...

...WE'RE GRATEFUL THAT GREGOR'S TOXIC PRESENCE IS GONE. BUT WE CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER:

WHAT *OTHER* MONSTERS FROM SPIDER-MAN'S PAST WILL COME SLITHERING OUT OF THE SHADOWS TO *TERRORIZE* US?

"WE LIVE OUR LIVES," MJ SAID. AND SO WE *DO*...

...GOING BACK TO OUR JOBS--ME WITH MY SCIENCE STUDENTS AT THE COLLEGE, MARY JANE WITH THE THEATER KIDS AT THE HIGH SCHOOL.

HER PRODUCTION OF *LES MISERABLES* IS A WONDER TO BEHOLD. I'M *SO PROUD* OF HER. AND I KNOW THAT...

...AS LONG AS MY WIFE IS BY MY SIDE, I CAN FACE *ANYTHING.* AND, WITH OUR BABY--THIS TINY WONDER, THIS LIVING MIRACLE--ON THE WAY...

...I CAN'T, I *WON'T,* SURRENDER TO THE SHADOWS--OUT IN THE WORLD OR IN THE CORNERS OF MY MIND.

IF I'VE LEARNED ANYTHING IN LIFE, IT'S THAT EVEN IN THE DARKEST TIMES...

...*ESPECIALLY* IN THE DARKEST TIMES...

...*LOVE*...

AJA
ORISHA
BELOVED
MOTHER and HEALER
...WILL ALWAYS LIGHT THE WAY.
THE END!

#1 VARIANT BY EJIWA "EDGE" EBENEBE

#1 VARIANT BY
KYLE HOTZ & RACHELLE ROSENBERG

#2 BEYOND AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
VARIANT BY OSCAR FETSCHER

#2 VARIANT BY
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T

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